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Is There a Future for Krakovo Gardens in Ljubljana?

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Abstract. Urban agriculture is more or less marginalized within the theory, as well as within the conceptualization of sustainable development for Slovene towns. The spatial development plan of Ljubljana reflects the situation: permanent and temporary locations for gardens are to be situated all over the town, but there is no place for them in the inner city centre, in visually exposed sites, or near areas of cultural heritage. Yet, in the very inner centre of Ljubljana, 1.8 ha of allotment gardens are protected as cultural heritage. Therefore the case of these gardens, known as the Krakovo gardens, was used to discuss the perspective of urban agriculture in Ljubljana. The current condition of the gardens is poor – becoming worse. To keep them cultivated and in this way preserve the historic open space benefits a model of multifunctional urban agriculture was developed and studied with the relevant stakeholders: landowners, the Municipality of Ljubljana, providers/users of the on-garden activities, and the general public. Analysis SWOT show that the concept of revitalising the Krakovo gardens based on the model of multifunctional urban agriculture represents a good starting point for their future development. Testing the acceptability of the model revealed that the key stakeholders, Municipality of Ljubljana and landowners, are exercising more restraint than favour toward it. This means that first the institutional conditions for its implementation need to be created by two possible scenarios. The first one relates to creating the conditions for concept implementation by means of public-private partnership, while the second is based on the model of lease and purchase of the land bearing the Krakovo gardens by the Municipality.

Keywords. Multifunctional agriculture, urban agriculture, cultural heritage protection, Krakovo gardens, Ljubljana.

1 Introduction

Urban agriculture as an economic activity, space use and social phenomena are not studied systematically in Slovenia. The topic is more or less marginalized within the theory, as well as within the conceptualization of sustainable development for Slovene towns. Allotment gardens are still considered more as a rural pollution of urban lifestyles, than as an expression of an essential/profound need of modern townspeople. The regulation of gardening, introduced by the authorities, reflects such an attitude. It is very often so strict and inflexible that it hinders self-initiative and self-realization (key elements) of allotment gardening (Vastl, 2001). Furthermore, such strict regulation

leads to deformation in the field of urban agriculture in terms of practice and control.

In Ljubljana, allotment gardens cover about 200 ha of land which corresponds to the area of the inner city centre. As such, the Municipality of Ljubljana has been practicing regulation of gardening since 1985 (Odlok..., 1985). Yet, after 20 years it has become obvious that this activity, also regulated in each and every detail, went wrong: very often gardening practices were far from ecologically sound practices, took place on unsuitable locations (water protection areas, areas protected by Natura 2000, river banks, etc.) or allotments were used for other purposes than self-sufficient vegetable and fruit production (summer houses, parties, etc.). It is obvious that measures to keep gardening in line with spatial and social development have been absent.



Figure 1. Typical allotment gardens in Ljubljana

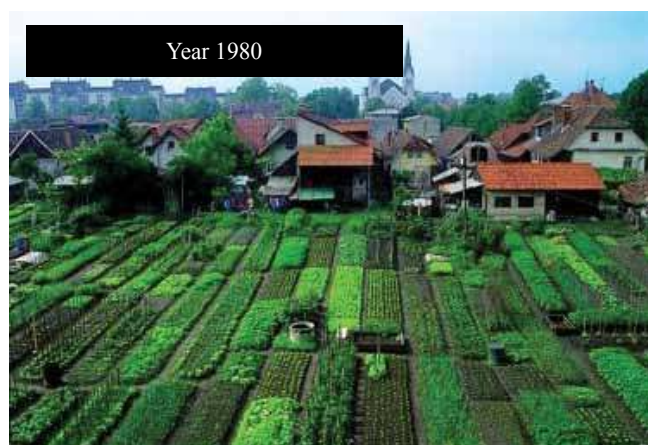


Figure 2. Ljubljana Krakovo gardens in the years 1930 and 1980

The very new spatial development plan of the town has an ambition to take a more holistic approach to allotment gardening. Yet, the document itself revealed an ambiguity in this field. On one hand, there is recognition of a strong move toward urban agriculture in major world metropolises in the developed countries that Ljubljana should follow. Therefore, permanent and temporary locations for gardens are to be situated all over the town and be accessible to the inhabitants. On the other hand, urban agriculture is still an issue that Ljubljana is not comfortable with “there is no place for allotments in the inner city centre, visually exposed sites or near areas of cultural heritage and cemeteries” (Mestna..., 2008). Furthermore, all the allotments have to be uniform, arranged and equally equipped (Simoneti and Kranjc, 2007; Odlok..., 2009). This raises a question about the development of urban agriculture in Ljubljana being in line with the needs of the people.

Yet in the very inner centre of Ljubljana is 1.8 ha of allotment gardens that are protected as cultural heritage. Therefore, the case of these gardens was used to discuss the perspective of urban agriculture in Ljubljana.

During the long and interesting history of vegetable production in the Krakovo gardens a special land use pattern developed that, thirty years ago, was recognized and protected as cultural heritage (Odlok..., 1986).

As a legally protected cultural heritage site, the traditional use of the gardens is embedded in the development plan of Ljubljana as well.

The current condition of the Krakovo gardens is poor – and becoming worse as the official private owners of the plots (108) are not interested in traditional vegetable production, and public intervention in compliance with the Cultural Heritage Protection Act (Zakon..., 2008) is absent.

To overcome this situation the idea of a revitalisation model for the Krakovo gardens based on the principles of multi-functional urban agriculture was launched (Vadnal et al., 2009). The research hypotheses were as follows: 1. Krakovo gardens have to be conceived as a multidimensional system with four basic functions – production, education, social care and space, all originating from the idea of gardens as an element of urban agriculture; 2. Krakovo gardens can be revitalised in an economical way without compromising their historical value and image. In this case the preservation of historical heritage is the precondition for sustainable economic vitality of the system; 3. Krakovo gardens can only be revitalised by means of a public-private partnership because the land is private property, their functions enabling the local community to provide services related to meeting common needs (social function, educational function); and 4. With regard to potential functions of the Krakovo gardens, the public-private partnership can be implemented as a contractual partnership in the form of a concession relationship and social entrepreneurship. The research is multidisciplinary in nature; a particular integration of methods of natural and social sciences has been formed and used, the key emphasis being on the method of participatory research. Workshops for



Figure 3. Position of Krakovo gardens in Ljubljana in the year 1744 and in the center of modern Ljubljana.

the Future (Danish..., 2006) were carried out with four relevant groups of stakeholders: land owners, representatives of the Municipality of Ljubljana, providers/users of on-gardens activities, and the general public. The results of the research are organized in SWOT matrices.

2 Analysis SWOT of the revitalization model based on multifunctional urban agriculture regarding function

2.1 Production function

The natural conditions and resources (microclimate, soil, water) of vegetable production are still as good as ever. Yet, marketing of the produced vegetable poses a weighty problem in terms of actual primary marketing channels (absence of economy of scale, small quantity of products). Strengthening the concept of urban agriculture within the strategy of sustainable development of Ljubljana through community supported food production should overcome this weakness. Furthermore, implementation of the economy of scope through social and educational functions will improve economic vitality of the gardens.

2.2 Social function

Providers of social services are highly interested in “green” programs, as actual experiences with the “green” programs in social care are rather good. These programs make use of positive effects of human-plant interaction and provide numerous meaningful activities for different groups with special needs, intellectually disabled, people with mental



Figure 4. Krakovo gardens today

health problem and seniors in particular. Furthermore, “green” programs proved to be successful promoter of inclusive social services, as well as inclusive development patterns. Yet, interlacing vegetable production and social care may face several problems, such as seasonal supply of the activities, inexperience of the users-people with special needs in the field of vegetable production, lack of skills in vegetable production of the instructors/users and limited labour capacity of the users. Land organization is not suitable for special needs (wheel-chairs) and infrastructure needed for the users (shelters, dining rooms, wardrobes, toilets, etc) is not available. The fact, that

social stigmatisation of people with special needs is still present, also very often stifled, is one of the major threats to the green social care program on the Krakovo gardens.

2.3 Educational function

Vegetable production on the Krakovo gardens provides an excellent opportunity for experience-based learning in terms of nutritional competence, good gardening practices as well as history and culture. The gardens are situated in the historic area and accessible via public transportation. Therefore, already existing nets of eco and healthy schools and of target publics (societies) can make use of the gardens during the season of vegetable production and out of it. The main threat is the fact that the owners may oppose to open the gardens to the general public. On the other hand, underestimation of the nutritional competence within the field of protecting health and of gardening as a meaningful activity may hinder development of educational function on the Krakovo gardens.

2.4 Spatial function

As historical and spatial continuum the Krakovo gardens are unique site of Ljubljana. Therefore tourism business shows strong interest in maintaining this spatial entity of worth. On the other hand, the owners are not interested in preserving the spatial quality of the gardens. Historic land use pattern

does not correspond to their needs any more: productive plots are transformed into residential gardens or abandoned. As actions in the field of preservation of the gardens as cultural heritage are absent, the Krakovo gardens are facing spatial degradation and due to policy of town condensation they are threatened to be built up. This threat is real as general public in Ljubljana is ignorant about the gardens as a valuable spatial entity.

3 The relevant stakeholders view on the revitalization model of the Krakovo gardens based on multifunctional urban agriculture

Land owners are more adverse to than in favour of the model. It is their opinion that the weaknesses of the model exceed its strengths. Their main arguments against were as follows:

- Restriction of private property rights imposed by regulation on cultural heritage protection
- Planned usages of the gardens do not correspond with their interests.
- Access of the users of planned activities to the gardens will diminish the quality of their lives.
- Vegetable production requires an infrastructure that will change the image and quality of the gardens.

Of all the planned functions, they are inclined to support the educational one only. On the other hand, they are not at all comfortable with social programs on the gardens for the people with special needs (mentally disabled, persons with mental health problems, homeless persons, etc.).

The owners stressed that the only benefit from the suggested model is the possibility that owners who are neglecting their gardens would get proper assistance to cultivate them.

The Municipality of Ljubljana is inclined to support the model and sees its major strengths as follows:

- Strengthening the ecological conscience of the townspeople.
- Ecological education of the townspeople.
- Benefits for tourism.

It is obvious that multifunctionality is not a concept that town authorities are generally familiar with, and that holistic philosophy is missing. This is also the main reason for the absence of proper management with regard to the public good of the gardens as protected cultural heritage, as well as for the inability of a creating private-public partnership with the owners to keep this spatial value vital.

The townspeople of Ljubljana, also more or less unaware of the historical value and implications of the Krakovo gardens, are in favour of the suggested model. They see that it provides a good opportunity to increase the nutritional competence and to buy really fresh vegetables. Yet, they are convinced that the city centre is not a proper place for vegetable production/gardening. Such an attitude reflects the common feeling that there is no room for agriculture in the town. That gardens plots should be bought by the Municipality

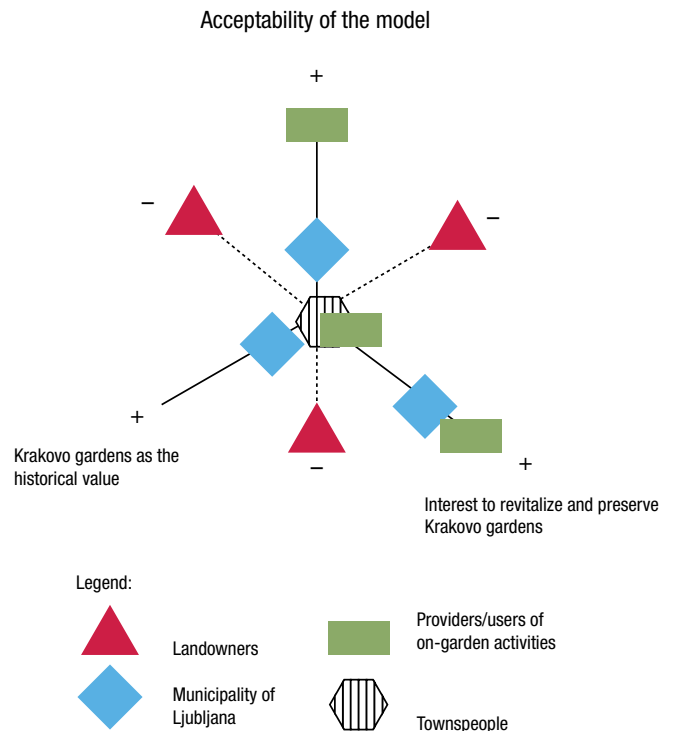


Figure 5. Position of stakeholders on the map of the relevant model dimensions

and then assembled and consolidated into a new public park is a common suggestion (Andrews, 2007) in discussing the future of the Krakovo gardens.

The actors behind the educational and social functions perceive the suggested model as a new challenge, as well as an excellent opportunity to fulfil their professional aims – inclusive and experience based processes of education and rehabilitation. As a weakness they stressed the seasonal nature of the activity and lack of necessary infrastructure.

4 Toward revitalization of the Krakovo gardens

The Krakovo gardens nowadays do not represent a quality open urban space, although they are legally protected as cultural heritage. The land owners, who own 96% of the gardens' area, do not respect regulation on the protection of cultural heritage but use the gardens according to their needs and interests. The Municipality of Ljubljana formally demonstrates public interest through its legal acts and developmental documents, but the proper sanctions are missing in practice. SWOT analyses reveal that the concept of revitalising the Krakovo gardens based on the model of multifunctional urban agriculture represents a good starting point for future development and provide guidelines for the activities needed.

Yet, testing the acceptability of the suggested model as regards the relevant stakeholders (land owners, Municipality of Ljubljana, providers/users of on-garden and townspeople) raised a new question: whether there is authentic public interest to preserve the gardens, although public good is legally expressed. The key stakeholders, the Municipality of Ljubljana and landowners are exercising

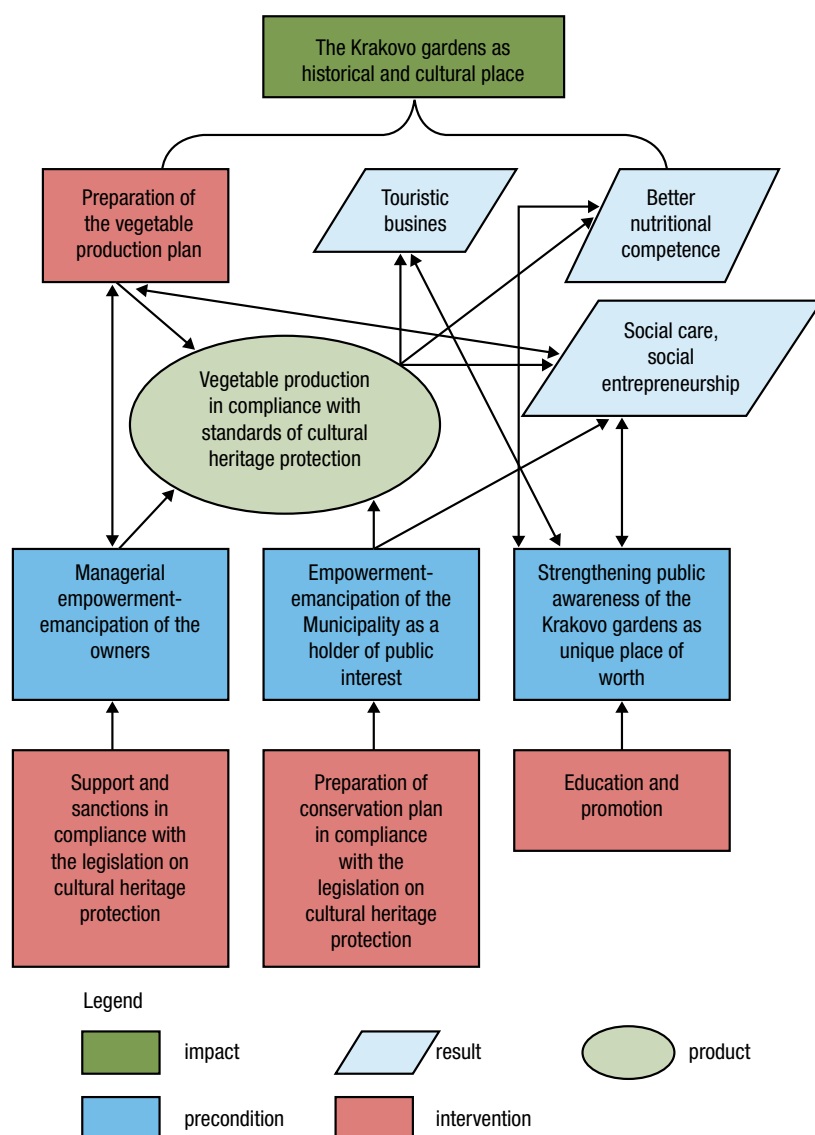


Figure 6. The blueprint of multifunctional revitalization of the Krakovo gardens

more restraint than favour toward the multifunctional urban agricultural model of revitalising and maintaining the Krakovo gardens. Under these circumstances the very existence of the gardens is threatened. This means that the suggested model, based on multifunctional urban agriculture, is not feasible immediately because the institutional conditions for its implementation need to be created first, which includes two possible scenarios.

The first relates to creating the conditions for concept implementation by means of a public-private partnership. In this case the key measure is to trigger the preliminary procedure in compliance with the provisions of the Public-Private Partnership Act (Zakon..., 2006). Based on the conservation (management) plan and in compliance with the Cultural Heritage Protection Act (Zakon..., 2008), the Municipality of Ljubljana would state whether the economic, legal, technical and environmental conditions to implement the project and to contract a public-private partnership are met, then define the basic elements of the partnership and issue a public call

inviting the potential promoters to submit applications proclaiming their interest in the implementation of the public-private partnership in revitalising the Krakovo gardens.

The second scenario of ensuring the conditions is based on the model of lease and purchase of the land bearing the Krakovo gardens. At this stage, expropriation would not be justified, as property owners have not been confronted with proactive (the right to advice and instruction, to reimbursement, etc.) or repressive measures stipulated by the Cultural Heritage Protection Act (Zakon..., 2008). An analysis of economic perspectives on multifunctional use has shown that the Krakovo gardens if used multipurposely would be economically vital and sustainable despite the high introductory transaction costs.

Should proactive public intervention in the Krakovo gardens fail to be realised, their degradation will continue due to the dispersed and disorganized private ownership interest and being unable to fulfil the quality standards of its property in compliance with its status of cultural heritage.

Under these circumstances the very existence of the gardens is threatened, and an opportunity to preserve the historic open space benefit by putting multifunctional urban agriculture into practice will be missed.

5 Lesson learned

Only twenty years ago the Krakovo gardens were an important source of fresh vegetable for town people in Ljubljana. To shop at Ljubljana green market on Saturday morning was an economically sound and pleasant task. Along with economic prosperity the vegetables from the gardens were not in demand anymore. By losing productive function a historical and cultural context of the gardens became obsolete. It is very likely, that there are very many food producing plots or gardens in the urban areas of developed and developing countries that are facing the same challenge. Food production always leaves behind a cultural footprint that has to be cherished and preserved.

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